

Court gives Legislature more time on schools plan

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OLYMPIA -- The Legislature can have more time to explain how it will provide enough money to cover basic education in the state, the Washington Supreme Court said.

The court, which has held the state in contempt for not meeting its constitutional duty to education children, gave the Legislature until July 27 or 15 days after the current special session -- whichever comes first -- to explain its plan to fix public schools.

An order signed today by Chief Justice Barbara Madsen acknowledges the travails of this year's Legislature, which already used up its regular session and a 30-day special session trying to agree on a budget that would pay for that plan. Monday is the 11th day of the second special session, and legislators have not yet agreed on how much the state will spend over the next two years, which is a decision that would precede deciding how it will be spent.

The Legislature has had a contempt order hanging over its head since last September, when the court ruled the plan submitted last year wasn't adequate. It gave the Legislature until the end of the session this year to fix that, extending the stay again when the regular session ended and the first special session was ordered by Gov. Jay Inslee.

One disquieting detail in Monday's order: July 27 would actually be the end of a third special session, should one be needed if a budget isn't passed by the end of the second special session.